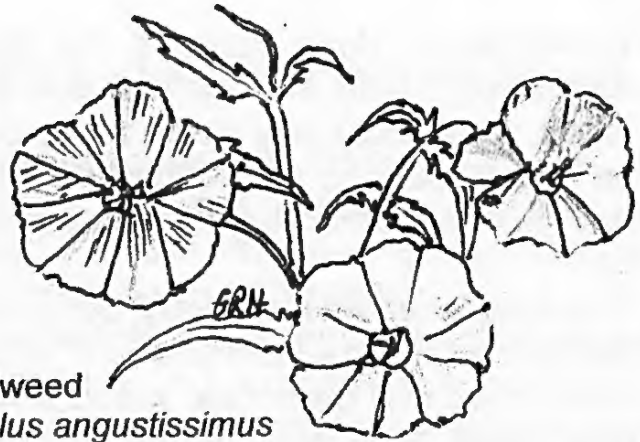


Castlemaine Naturalist

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Pink Bindweed
Convolvulus angustissimus

Springtime at its best! - Gill Raynor and Tony Bates

Odd, how things that appear to have gone wrong have actually gone quite right! I was due to have a hip replacement operation in August, but thanks to a nasty virus, had to have it postponed until October...very frustrating, and at the time, quite a setback... but, once accepted...an opportunity. An opportunity to really experience springtime while I could!

So, we made our plans accordingly, and we had the whole of September in which to carry them out! We had read about the Whipstick Forest, but had never actually got there...so that was first on our list.

What a treasure trove of plant life that place is! Although very dry at the time (and possibly a little early in the season) we found plants that we'd only ever previously seen in books. Clumps of flowering Cypress Daisy Bush, large stands of Sweet Bursaria, Totem Poles (not in flower...but still quite a thrill to find in such numbers!) Rosemary Grevillea, Williamson's Wattle, and at least two types of flowering pea. Then there were the wildflowers...Waxlip Orchids, Blue Caladenia, and the tiny Twining Fringe Lily. What a great day out, and only marred by the extensive amount of rubbish dumped around the place! Sad to see the place...well...desecrated, was the feeling that we had.

Anyway, onto our next spring outing, which was to a lovely little house in the middle of an olive grove, on the way to Kerang. Dog friendly accommodation too, which was really great, as our two dogs really appreciated that! We were keen to see what was left of the Murray while it's still there (I wish that was entirely in jest...but I'm sure we all have genuine concerns about it)!

As expected the river was very low, but enough there for the dogs to enjoy a paddle, and for us to enjoy the sight of a reasonably large expanse of water! We immediately made plans to take a trip on the only

vessel which does tours of the Barmah Forest Wetlands - the MV Kingfisher. I rang the operator and was told that due to such low water levels, they could only go on a day by day advice on whether they would be able to set out, so that day was "out", but, fortunately for us, the next day we had a call to say that the trip would be on, and off we went.

The Kingfisher was specially designed for shallow water, but we had to depend on the considerable skill of our driver, who navigated numerous dead trees and branches, which were very close to the surface, but we saw some wonderful wildlife, water turtles, wallabies feeding in the rushes, and birds...a pair of Sea Eagles, a group of Azure Kingfishers, White Bellied Woodswallows, Reed Warblers, just to name the most outstanding.

Then, on our way back to our little holiday home, we stopped to check out an unnamed swamp on a back road, and saw...a BROLGA! What a sight that was! Plus a pair of Shelducks, then onto the swamp, with it's group of Cormorants, Moorhens, Australasian Grebes, Reed Warblers, and a tiny dotterel type bird, which (I think!) I've identified as being a Black Fronted Plover. On the way back we saw a beautiful White-necked Heron, and a Yellow Spoonbill. Another great day out!

So...our last day in the olive grove, so I was up early to take the dogs out, and there, sitting in the hedge were a pair of Diamond Firetails...preening themselves in the sunshine! Our walk around the orchard sent a couple of hares racing for cover...then it was back to the house, and time to pack up, and head for home. All up, a very rewarding time away.

So, it was back to Maldon, but not the end to the Springtime rendezvous, as we took a drive out to our magnificent Rock of Ages in Maldon, where the ground was covered in tiny Early Nancy flowers, Austral Indigo, and a form of tiny pink native convolvulus* (which I've not been able to identify!) not to mention some wonderful Rock Correa, and two types of pea.

I finished off, the Springtime experience with a very interesting and equally rewarding Wildflower Walk with our Castlemaine Field Nats, so skillfully lead by our very knowledgeable George Broadway. Thank you George, and to all at Field Nats for a great ending to a fabulous Springtime experience...now I just have to psyche myself up for the upcoming Op!

*P.S. Pink Bindweed *Convolvulus angustissimus* (was *C. erubescens*)

September Excursion Report - 15/9/07 - Hans van Gemert

The October excursion was listed as an "Orchid Walk" but a decision on the location was left as late as possible because orchids are a bit thin on the ground this year. In the end our leader, George Broadway, selected two spots in the bush behind Chewton.

After a slow start in an area which had been subject to severe ecological thinning, we found four orchids and a respectable number of other wildflowers. Pink Fingers was the most abundant orchid although not in the numbers seen in other years. An exciting find (by Elvyne Hogan) was a small, white *Caladenia* with a wiry, dark purple stem, which after some discussion was positively identified as *Caladenia fuscata*, now sometimes known as *Petalochatus fuscatus* (Dusky Fingers). The most common non-orchids in flower were Pink Bells and Handsome Flat-pea. Later in the afternoon George discovered a pair of Crimson Spider Orchids and, subsequently, other members then found more in nearby locations. The full plant list is given below, and is restricted to those species actually in flower.

Our numbers were down a little due to a gathering hosted by the Bendigo Native Plant Group at the same time. It was pleasing to see some new faces on this excursion.

Orchids

- Caladenia camea* (Pink Fingers)
- C. concolor* (Crimson Spider Orchid)
- Diuris pardina* (Leopard Orchid)
- Glossodia major* (Wax-lip Orchid)
- Caladenia fuscata* (Dusky Fingers)
- Pterostylis melagramma* (Tall Greenhood)

Other flowering plants

- Acacia acinacea* (Gold Dust Wattle)
- A. pycnantha* (Golden Wattle)
- Drosera auriculata* (Tall Sundew)
- D. macrantha* (Climbing Sundew)
- D. whittakeri* (Scented Sundew)
- Grevillea alpina* (Downy Grevillea)
- Microseris* sp 3 (Yam-daisy)
- Philotheca verrucosus* (Fairy or Bendigo Waxflower)
- Pimelea linifolia* (Slender Rice-flower)
- Platylobium formosum* (Handsome Flat-pea)
- Stackhousia monogyna* (Creamy Candles)
- Tetratheca ciliata* (Pink Bells)
- Thysanotus patersonii* (Twining Fringe-lily)
- Wurmbea dioica* (Early Nancy)



Dusky fingers
Caladenia fuscata
Note: Has forward pointing extensions on the lateral lobes of the labellum like an upturned collar.

Debbie Worland – A friend of the Swift Parrots

Committee member Debbie Worland is well known as a dedicated spokesperson for the nationally endangered Swift Parrots that annually visit the Castlemaine area to feed before returning to breed in Tasmania.

For at least the last seven years Debbie has kept detailed records of sightings and regularly submitted records to DSE Bendigo, the Swift Parrot Recovery Team in Canberra and the Dept of Environment and Heritage in Canberra. She has also sent sightings to Birds Australia and BOCA and recently Debbie submitted her records to DSE Wildlife Atlas of Victoria to be added to their data base.

Debbie contributed valuable information to the Swift Parrot Habitat Management Plan for the Mount Alexander Shire.

Debbie has recorded excellent video footage of Swift Parrots feeding in the trees and on the ground in Castlemaine. This video was recently used at the VCAT hearing regarding removal of trees alongside the road to Maldon. It was also viewed by the panel at the C24 meeting for the Mt Alexander Shire, and last year it was shown at the NCCMA's seminar on Swift Parrots held at the Ray Bradfield Rooms. To her credit Debbie's dedication has now been rewarded with a substantial offer of funding from the Norman Wettenhall Foundation to transfer her video of local Swift Parrots into CD format.

Last month Debbie visited grades 2/3 and 3/4 at Campbells Creek Primary School to show her video and talk with the children about Swift Parrots in our area; and about two years ago she gave a talk to the young students at Chewton Primary School on Swift Parrots and the school then organised trees to be planted to encourage Swift Parrots to their school.

Debbie is a good example of how the actions of an individual can make a real difference. She is indeed a fine spokesperson and friend of the Swift Parrots.

Thank you to this month's newsletter contributors.

Subscriptions for 2007

Ordinary membership: Single \$22, Family \$30

Pensioner or student: Single \$19, Family \$24

The subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Observations

- 14/9 Upper Goulburn. Deer, probably Sambar (*Cervus unicolour*) grazing on Blue Periwinkle (*Vinca major*) within town boundary – has not occurred in the last 40 years. Possible reasons – bush fires/ drought. Deer scats in good condition. John Cole
- 14/9 Single Swift Parrot on front verandah in Preshaw St this morning feeding on blossom. Julie Hurley
- First Grey Shrike-thrush in garden (Wheeler St) for some years. George Broadway
- Fan-tailed Cuckoo in garden at Muckleford – also Mistletoebirds. Alison Rowe
- At Lancefield Pallid Cuckoo, Horsefields Bronze Cuckoo and “albino” Scarlet Robin (possibly a leucistic bird, see article on page 4 of the April 2007 newsletter). Robyn van Smeerdijk
- Good view of a pair of Striated Fieldwrens in Merrifield St – north of their usual range as the result of the drought perhaps. Dennis Hurley
- Wewak Track on Porcupine Ridge – flowers at least as impressive if not better than two years ago. Richard Piesse
- Hundreds of Pink Fingers (*Caladenia carnea*) on Wednesday Walk with the Taradale Walking Club. George Broadway
- Powerful Owl and chick reported in Castlemaine Botanical Gardens – also Wood Duck with brood of six. Richard Piesse

From the Business Meeting 27/9/07

Welcome to new members: Aaron and Nita Hall

- A Club submission regarding the Bendigo Forest Management Plan has been lodged expressing some criticism of the lack of protection for threatened species. The two local areas affected are Muckleford and Fryers Range State Forests.
- The Norman Wettenhall Foundation has provided \$30,000 the Central Victorian Landscape Restoration Project and a position for a part-time Project Officer to oversee this important project has been advertised.
- A number of members attended the recent VCAT hearings concerning removal of trees along side the roads to Maldon and Heathcote. On both occasions members acting as independent contributors opposing the Vicroads proposal did a superb job and made a good impression with thoroughly researched and well co-ordinated presentations.
- Ern and Lesley Perkins have compiled an impressive and extensive database of plants from survey work on 30m quadrats at approximately 60 sites in the local area.

The English Hedgerow, Will it Survive? – Chris Morris

Having known and explored English Hedgerows in earlier years, then fought to save the hawthorn hedges along Tasmanian lanes (Midland Councils in the 1960's sought to eradicate them by herbicide spraying so drivers could better see around corners). Now I fear the worst for their future in England and felt it worthwhile to record my impressions. It's not all bad news - the hedgerows are still there though vastly depleted in number and dependent on far sighted landowners where trees are left as part of the hedge.

There is a formulae where each tree in a hundred feet of hedge will give you a hundred years of age, so some go back to Roman and Saxon times. In addition there is an amazing number of wildflowers growing out from hedge lines with cow parsley dominant and our old 'friend' gorse spilling out along the edges. In Scotland and the high country capped freestone rock walls take the place of hedges.

In many places the hawthorn branches are layered and interlaced during winter pruning - an art still in existence. This seems to please the hedgerow birds which are very vocal and less timid than their Australian cousins. The long summer evenings bring out the occasional Pheasant and Partridge fossicking along winding lanes for food. A Great Spotted Woodpecker was a special treat and there was no shortage of Blue Tits, Robins (more of a rusty red than ours) Warblers, Yellowhammers, finches and the Wren with that wonderful name (*Troglodytes troglodytes*), Magpies harsh of voice and long of tail, Linnets, and Buntings.

Cropping instead of dairy herds and spreading fertilizers needing more working space for larger farm machinery, leads to the loss of miles of hedges and change to the worse not only to the natural beauty of the countryside but to the wildlife that depends on the hedges. No guarantee of preservation stands between a hedge and its removal. If the road calls for widening or the farmer finds in favour of barbed wire then it takes a couple of hours to erase a hundred years of history and charm (sounds familiar). As one advocate put it "Isn't the scene glorious, and the reason for that is that people cared enough to keep it that way".

At one time one Government Department would pay landholders to pull out hedges while another division would pay for planting hedges (again sounds familiar).

There is a strong belief that Government grants and subsidies on agriculture should be shifted from the production side to conservation of all that is best in historic farmlands and more money should be spent on restoring neglected hedgerows for both visual and ecological benefits.

There has to be an incentive for farmers to keep and maintain hedges, it can't be based on looks alone. Now, new hedges are planted – not enough maybe but at least slowing the rate of loss.

Extra Events

- **Thu Oct 11. Newstead Landcare - Managing and restoring the creeks and rivers of Central Victoria.** Prof. Sam Lake of Monash University's Dept of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. 8pm Newstead Community Centre. Non-members welcome.
- **Fri Oct 19. Norman Wettenhall and Trust for Nature Workshop.** (Details in September Newsletter).
- **Sun Oct 14. Birds Australia Outing in Castlemaine.** Committee member Chris Morris is leading a bird watchers outing. Departing from Market car park at 9.30am. BYO Lunch and drinks.
- **Sun Oct 14. Barkers Creek Landcare Walk** led by Ern Perkins from Castlemaine Field Naturalists (producer of the CD "Is it a Native" on weed identification). This activity will commence at 9.30am exact venue to be decided. Contact: Bob Twyford 5474 2739.
- **Sun Oct 28, Oxfam Walk against Want.** Start between 11.00am and 1.00pm at the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens. Walk, run or cycle 5 or 10 km along bush roads to the north of the Gardens. Judy Tregear 5470 5747 for sponsor book or make a donation on the day.
- **Fri Nov 2. Ballarat FNC - Stella Bedggood Memorial Lecture - Birds of the Wimmera.** Ian Morgan, nature photographer and president of the Horsham Branch of Bird Observation and Conservation Australia. 8pm at the Ballarat Horticultural Centre, cnr Gillies and Gregory St. Ballarat. Admission free and supper provided.
- **Mon Nov 5. Festival of Gardens Walk – Morgans Track.** Depart from car park opp the motel in Duke Street at 10.00am sharp. R Mills
- **Thu Nov 8. Newstead Landcare - How to find out about native vegetation** using Ian Higgins' (NCCMA) website. Newstead Community Centre, 8pm. Non-members welcome. For a sneak preview go to <http://mail.nccma.vic.gov.au/nvbmp/> NOTE: change of website from notice in last months newsletter.

Wed Sept 19. Wildflower Walk 1 G Harris – Sawmill Rd, Muckleford.

Eight of us ignored threatening skies to take part in the first walk of the season. We saw several large spreads of mixed colour under the light scattering of trees. Species in flower included Gorse Bitter-pea, Rice Flower, Creamy Candles, Pink Bells, Gold Dust Wattle, Spiky Guinea-flower, White Marianth, Dusty Miller, Sticky Everlasting, one Leopard, one Wax-lip and a few Pink Finger Orchids. A. Rowe

Wed Sep 26. Wildflower Walk 2 Chris Morris – The Monk

Despite a sombre sky, five hardy souls took the Wednesday evening opportunity to walk to The Monk. Amongst lavish groundcover of Billy Buttons there were good scatterings of Leopard Orchids, Wax-lips, Rice flowers, Mat-rush, Pink Fingers and others. Chris Morris

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

October 2007

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at Broadways, 7 Wheeler Street, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

Wednesday Evening Wildflower Walks: Visitors welcome. Wear Sturdy shoes. Depart from opp motel in Duke Street at 4pm sharp, return by 5.30pm.

Wed Oct 10. Wildflower Walk 4 Noel Young

Fri Oct 12. Currawinya National Park and Lake Eyre. Hans and Anne Van Gemert. UCA Hall (enter from Lyttleton Street), 8pm.

Sat Oct 13. Field Trip: The Long Forest - Bacchus Marsh. Leaders: Bruce Donaldson and Marilyn Hewish will lead us to good birding sites in this remnant area of valley. Full-day excursion. Car-pool and depart from car park opp motel in Duke St at 9am or make own way to Merrimu Reservoir car park (75km) by 10.15am. Come off the freeway into Gisborne; at the first roundabout at the bottom of the hill near Coles turn right to Bacchus Marsh. Before BM turn left to Diggers Rest, and quite close to the beginning of that road is the reservoir car park. BYO lunch, morning & afternoon tea and binoculars. Copies of Long Forest Booklet will be available for sale. Contact: Bruce Donaldson, 5427 0364.

Wed Oct 17. Wildflower Walk 5 Richard Piesse – Kalimna. (see info above)

Oct 19, 20, 21. Club Campout in the Grampians. Contact: G Harris 5474 2244.

Fri Nov 9 Conserving Natural Values on Private Land – P Collier & R Garnett

Sat Nov 10. Field Trip: Wewak Track.

Sat Nov 24. Roadside Cleanup

Fri Dec 14. Members Night

Sat Dec 15. December Christmas Outing: Vaughan Springs

2007 Committee

Natalie de Maccus (President) 5472 4499

Rita Mills 5472 4553

Alison Rowe (Treasurer) 0408 899 283

Chris Morris 0418 996 289

Hans van Gemert (Public Officer) 5472 1082

Richard Piesse 0448 572 867

Debbie Worland 5472 2474

Noel Young 5472 1345

George Broadway (Secretary) 5472 2513 georgebroadway@bigpond.com

Geraldine Harris (Newsletter Editor) 5474 2244, gedharris@castlemaine.net

Website: <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~cfnc>

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc., PO Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450. Inc
Inc #A0003010B